

Interpretive Report

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Is the Year 2000 Plan Dead?

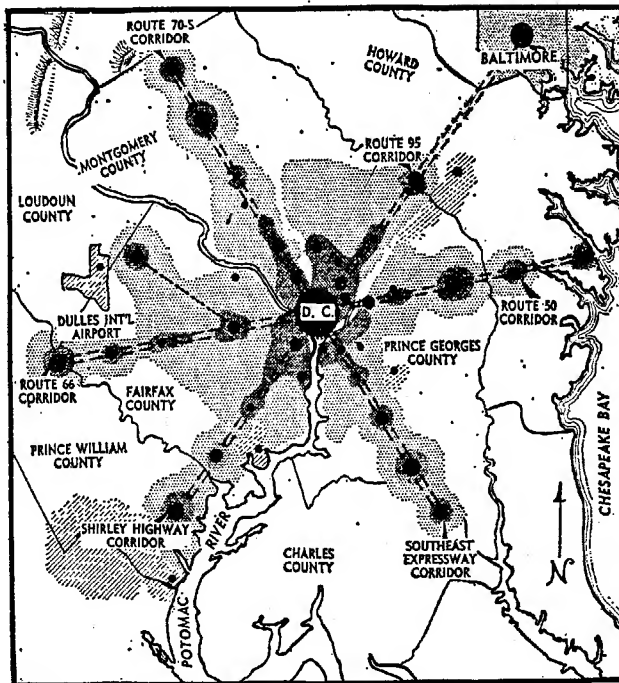
By LEE FLOR

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Elected officials in Montgomery, Fairfax, and Prince Georges Counties are going to have to start grappling with an immense problem in the next few months — where will they put the homes for the additional 5 million people expected to move into the suburbs by the Year 2000?

Since 1961, a Year 2000 Plan, proposed in 1961 and endorsed by political leaders of the Washington area in 1964, recommended putting the increased residential development in six corridors of growth. The planners and elected officials felt a "concert of public actions" would permit them to guide this development in an orderly way and stop helter-skelter "suburban sprawl."

The 1961 plan said there were around 2.5 million people in the metropolitan area, and an additional 2.5 million people might be expected to move here by the Year 2000. However, a new population estimate made last year changed this. Now planners expect the population of the Washington



This is the original Year 2000 Plan.

area to jump from around 2.7 million people in 1967 to around 7.7 million in the Year

2000. Almost all of these people are expected to be moving into the suburbs. The old esti-

mate, of around 2.5 million people needing space for new homes, was only half-right.

And perhaps worst of all, it looks as though the Year 2000 Plan is dying on its feet. The plan is developing major faults, and local governments have only a few months or years of grace, at the most, to settle on some basic regional development concepts.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, which conducts the major regional planning effort here with federal housing grants, had its staff make an analysis of the Year 2000 Plan. The staff study, released last month, concluded that "there is a need to re-evaluate the comprehensive development policies for the Washington area" which were incorporated in the six-corridor Year 2000 Plan.

This is a period of great confusion and turmoil in the planning area. Northern Virginia local governments have just abolished the Northern Virgin-

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Plan for Area in Trouble

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ia Regional Planning and Economic Development Commission. The commission had represented seven city and county governments there, and had tried to develop a local Year 2000 Plan.

On the other side of the Potomac River, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is in grave danger of being dismembered by the Montgomery and Prince Georges County governments.

In the District, top members of the National Capital Planning Commission have resigned, recommending that President Nixon abolish their organization and give District planning responsibility to the city government.

The Council of Government's planning structure, therefore, is also subject to change, if for no other reason than its relationships with other planning organizations. While the Year 2000 Plan itself is in trouble, it is apparent that the structure behind regional planning itself is also going to be examined, to see why previous plans have failed.

The Council of Government's planning staff analysis of the Year 2000 Plan shows some of the defects developing in the plan, and indicates why the organization's planning structure and sphere of responsibilities should be examined.

The staff conclusion mentions that there was a "vagueness of the stated policy" for some parts of the plan, and said that "new ways to implement development objectives must be found."

Here are some of the major discrepancies the council's planning staff uncovered for the plan:

HOUSING GAP — In 1960, the residents of the Washington metropolitan area had a deficiency of around 74,000 dwelling units needed to give families decent housing. This gap is estimated to have increased to 114,000 homes in 1968. If present housing policies and trends continue, the housing gap probably will increase to around 186,000 dwelling units by 1985, the planners estimated.

They also said that many suburban land development policies acted to increase the price of homes, at a time when suburban governments should be trying to increase the sup-

ply of low and moderate income housing.

OPEN SPACES — The original concept of the six-corridor plan was that the open space between the intensively-developed corridors would be preserved by a variety of methods, such as acquisition for parkland, large estate zoning, acquisition of easements, etc.

The staff analysis said that "since 1960 open space preservation has had little actual effect on the form of regional growth..."

It said that a "significant amount of development" has taken place during the 1960s in areas recommended for open space wedges, and said this was "particularly true in Fairfax and Prince Georges Counties."

The preservation of the open space wedges has been limited to date... only about one-tenth of the proposed wedge areas have been preserved so far," and this includes all park acquisitions over the past 40 years, the staff pointed out.

SEWER DEVELOPMENT

—The suburban maps of proposed sewer development show extensive spread of planned sewers into open space corridors. If the preservation of the open space wedges is still desired, planning bodies and local governments will have to alter the location or effectiveness of the sewer developments, or otherwise widespread subdivision development will result, the staff said.

TRANSPORTATION — One major part of the original plan was the concept that rail rapid transit lines and freeways would be provided for each corridor, and would attract development because the transportation facilities would be connected to a downtown Washington core of employment and major office headquarters.

However, the transit network is late getting off the launching pad, and parts of it for the suburbs are not even authorized by Congress. Inner city connections for the freeways appear blocked, and at least one of the freeways needed for corridors does not exist and is not planned, the staff said.

Also, arterial freeways are wedges, and these may encourage suburban sprawl un-

less stiff zoning controls are used by local governments, planners said.

There are 18 new communities in the corridors as proposed by various local and sub-regional plans. Only eight of these will be served by rapid transit and freeways, the staff said.

Ten new communities will be served only by freeways, without rapid transit. Four new communities will have neither transit or freeways.

FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT CENTERS — The original plan called for the federal government to place new employment centers in the corridor cities, as integral parts of smaller "downtown" areas for the regional cities.

The planning analysis pointed out that there were nine federal employment centers, with over 1,000 or more new employees, planned for locations outside the Capitol Beltway by 1985. Of these nine, only two will be within "corridor cities."

These two will be at Reston and Gaithersburg. They will be at separate locations, away from any rapid transit stations and freeways, and separate from any development of combined commercial-federal office development, the planners pointed out.

The staff analysis was presented to the board of directors of the Council of Governments on Sept. 11, and has been "referred" down to several subcommittees for analysis. In a few weeks, the subcommittees are supposed to indicate to the parent organization what the next step should be.

There are several alternatives.

One is to continue the status quo, in which suburban sprawl continues without much direction or "guidance" from public agencies and local governments.

Another would be to develop a new comprehensive regional plan, which may be required anyway under federal housing regulations before any freeway, transit, housing and sewer grants may be made.

Another would be just to make temporary interim regional planning studies, dealing with each crisis in regional planning as it develops.

One alternative which may be considered is to strengthen some way, so it can have some impact on regional planning.

Since it has had some responsibility since its leaders adopted the "corridor city concept" in January, 1964, some critics may feel the political and governmental process backing up regional planning is at fault in any impending collapse of the Year 2000 Plan, and in any failures which have developed so far.